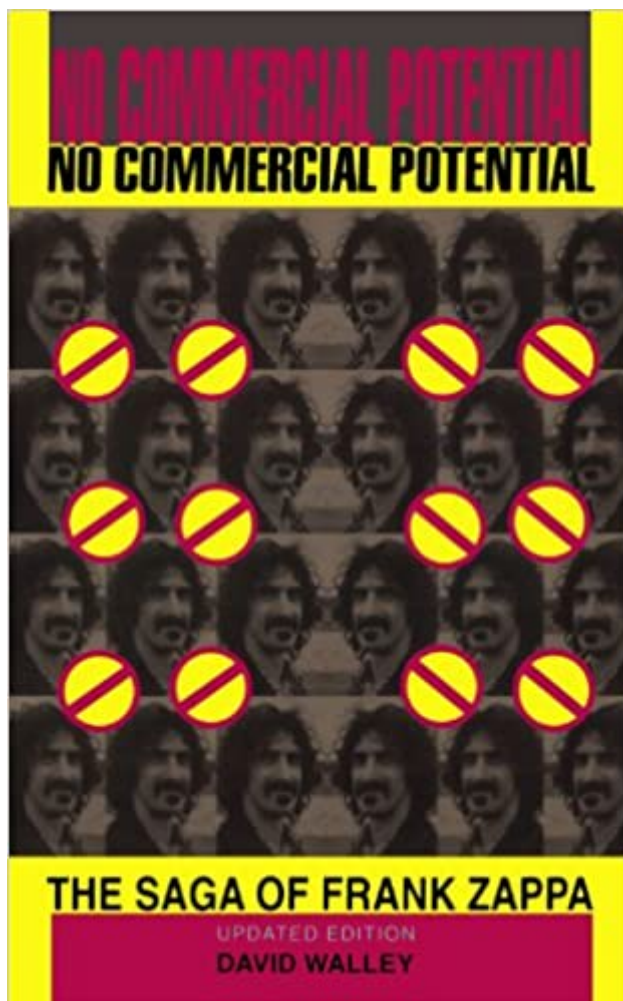


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No Commercial Potential: The Saga Of Frank Zappa



Synopsis

For nearly thirty years Frank Zappa (1940–1993) pursued an idiosyncratic but influential course in music—rock, jazz, and classical composer (releasing over fifty albums); founder of the Mothers of Invention; guitarist, conductor, and producer; as well as social satirist, sonic scientist, First Amendment champion, and all-around iconoclast. This updated edition of David Walley's cutting-edge classic includes a new foreword, a substantial chapter carrying the Zappa saga through his death from cancer, an afterword, bibliography, discography, videography, and guide to Zappa on the Internet. From 1960's *Freak Out!* to the posthumous *Civilization Phase III, No Commercial Potential* offers converts and connoisseurs the most practical and penetrating book ever written on the musical phenomenon known as Frank Zappa.

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Customer Reviews

Once considered the best biography on American composer Frank Zappa available, David Walley's *No Commercial Potential: The Saga of Frank Zappa* still contains the most compelling and accurate portrait of Zappa at the beginning of his career. The latest edition has been updated by the author—which is odd, as Walley seems almost completely disenchanted with Zappa in the closing chapters—to quickly gloss over the last two decades of Zappa's life up to and including his death in 1993. The gold of this biography is still the original material from the seventies, which Walley wrote after spending a great deal of time with his subject. Anyone interested in Zappa and his music will not want to miss this fascinating, firsthand account of the man in what many consider to be the

prime years of his career. Anyone interested in a broader view of Zappa's life will also want to investigate Ben Watson's astounding intellectual analysis of Zappa's work, *The Negative Dialects of Poodle Play*, the collected offerings of *The Frank Zappa Companion*, and the word from the man himself, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*.

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This is an adequate follow-up read to *The Real Frank Zappa Book*. This book is valuable to the FZ fan as it takes a slightly revisionist approach. The opinions are not always positive, and there are some unpleasant things said. Yeah, the hard-core Zappa fan-atic might find this unpalatable, but there's nothing here serious enough to put the book down. This updated edition dates from 1996, and there is precious little this book tells about us about FZ in the years since the last edition. What the reader will notice is that the book previously was published in 1972 and 1980. It is clear that this updated edition has simply had the 28-page "I'm Not Satisfied" chapter added since the 1980 edition. The chapter's opening sentence, "Frank Zappa's last thirteen years . . ." is a dead giveaway that it's an add-on. As such, it just doesn't have any depth; the cynic in me sees a hastily-produced chapter put together to capitalize on interest in FZ after his 1993 death. (The lightweight, 25-page "Cosmic Debris" chapter covering the 1972-80 period is also a lame add-on to the original 1972 edition.) The years 1980-93 were FZ's most productive, most vocal, and most creative, and to sum up this period with a short chapter to justify an updated edition is just plain disrespectful. There are also updates to the bibliography, discography, and clearly a newly-added "Zappa on the Internet" section. The book is best when discussing the early FZ/Mothers years. Keeping in mind that this book was first published in 1972, it's not surprising to see that the first 150-odd pages of this 211-page book are devoted to this period. There are lots of great quotes, photos, and graphics such as old handbills and maps. Lots of good information on the satellites in the FZ universe, such as the

band members, groupies, the GTOs, etc. The layout makes this book an easy and flowing read. It goes quickly, and is very much enjoyable. Despite some of the observations made above, I do recommend this book.

David Walley third and last edition of NO COMMERCIAL POTENTIAL: THE SAGA OF FRANK ZAPPA was published in 1995. After reading the 1st edition in 1972 (hot off the press) and in the spirit of "Absolutely Free," I immediately gave my copy to the organist of a rock band called The Last Rite (well known in Columbus, Ohio at the time). He, of course, was delighted and still has the book. Thus, when I saw the 3rd edition available, I immediately purchased it. However, this time, I won't give it away. If you are like me, when you read this SAGA, you'll get flashbacks to your youth. It's a great book for those of us who want to remember the 60's and 70's. "The more things change, the more they stay the same" is a truism that hits the reader right between the eyes. I was stunned when I realized Zappa's freedom of speech struggle did not change over his entire life course. It is a book filled with paradox. Although the serious theme of freedom of speech is found in the book, it includes much to make one giggle. I read the entire book on an airplane and caught myself laughing aloud. I enjoyed reading NO COMMERCIAL POTENTIAL: THE SAGA OF FRANK ZAPPA just as much as I did the first time.

This is an older book with a bit of updates and the old part is still a fun read for those who don't know anything about Zappa. Aside from composing, the amazing thing that appears to get lost is that Zappa was one of 3 or 4 great guitarists of the 20th century. His use of the mixolydian mode combined with dissonance and fairly progressive technological effects throughout his career (speeding up oboes a minor third on Uncle Meat (1968) is an example) was extremely original and give his work its particular quality. It is true that Zappa was a control freak and he did abuse musicians since, as Gail Zappa has said, they (and anyone associated with Frank's work) were 'hired hands'. Anyone who views their fellow musician like that is going to be hard to work with. The accusation, however, that "Zappa endlessly recycled his own material rather than spend his time coming up with worthwhile new works" is a bit harsh. The progression of musicianship from Freak Out to The Yellow Shark is clear. No Commercial Potential does not discuss musical and working relationship issues but is more of a cultural look at how excessive and insular the 60's rock scene was - even though one has to realize that it does try to deify Frank in the first 150 pages.

Even though it's 'diluted' with the added on chapters (ie 1972-1993) the earlier stuff is excellent.

This was the first book on Frank Zappa, the benchmark. There are lots of negative quotes included here, giving a balanced view, because David didn't want his book to become just another piece of 'promotional trash'. These quotes are mainly from Captain Beefheart and Artie Tripp, who give their own controversial views on Frank's genius. Anyway, Frank tried to prevent it being published because he was angry with what it said. But this is an excellent read, it gives you a great feel for what was happening in LA/America in the 60s, the freak scene and all that, also it gives excellent insight into the albums. The later stuff is given a less intensive treatment, mainly because there is a lack of enthusiasm about most of it. There is also a piercing obituary ('afterword'), with some perceptive comments. You don't necessarily have to be a Zappa fan to enjoy this book. Thank you.

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